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ON ENDEMIC GOVERNANCE PROBLEMS

Another theory which has emerged from my PhD in the social sciences at QUT is this idea of 'endemic governance problems'. First off, I think it is good to explain that 'endemic' means something that is a characteristic of something else. In this case, the problems are endemic or characteristic to governance. It is also important to stipulate the difference between governance and government. Governance is the act of governing, whilst a government is the specific structure which political actors govern from.

With that covered, I can now explain that my main goal during doctoral research was to figure out what problems are common to democracy. I took a mixed methods approach (theoretical analysis and empirical analysis) and investigated various periods of 'democratic' government and many thinkers associated with democratic theory. The historical approach of looking into Ancient Athens, the Republic of Rome, Italian city-state republics, revolutionary England, France, and the USA, original thinkers from around the 1700s onwards, as well as modern international democratization documents led to seeing the same problematic themes. To offer an analogy, I kept seeing the same trees in this forest of information.

When I reached that point, I needed to see if these problems were potentially still around and better yet, to see if they might be affecting all governments globally and not just one locally. So I embarked on an empirical journey. I amassed and scrutinized a large number of documents stemming from various multinational organizations (like the United National Development Program) and non-governmental organizations (like Transparency International) and after a lot of culling came to fourteen documents which fit all the necessary parameters for analysis (for example, they had adequate length in words, they came from organizations with mandates relating to endemic problems or basic democracy, and they took an international outlook). Because of this, I was able to analyse documents covering all major global regions and saw that yes, in fact, we are still dealing with the same problems the Athenians were dealing with some 3500 years ago.

I suppose I should mention that there are seven endemic governance problems. They are (1) a lack of accountability, (2) a lack of transparency, (3) corruption, (4) inadequate representation, (5) inappropriate campaigning methods, (6) issues relating to the legitimacy of constitutions, and (7) the absence of long-term goals derived from the citizenry. It's rather strange that we are dealing with the same issues. I would have thought we could have resolved these problems long ago. Yet, we haven't, and that's a problem too.

Most people usually ask me if I know why we haven't resolved these problems. Although I don't think I have the answer, it may have something to do with the way we have evolved politically and the twists and bends our history has taken to get us to this point. The way our ancestors have approached these problems has often been in a piecemeal fashion as unfortunately no one has, to my knowledge, conducted an analysis like mine. This might indicate that we were missing the 'big picture' for some thousands of years. Another is that the analysis I conducted may not have even been possible until recently with the advent of the Internet and several very important publications in political theory

especially from the likes of John Keane (please read his masterful *Life and Death of Democracy*, 2009) and others like Ben Isakhan (look for his new book coming out next February, 2011, concerning the alternate histories of democracy). I hope that we might be able to come up with a more satisfying answer in the coming years.

It's important for us to consider each and every one of these problems separately, grouped in different ways, and in relation to the parameters of basic democracy. In current politics, the focus is usually on accountability, corruption, transparency, representation, and campaigning methods as well as elections. But we don't really hear the argument or concerns about whether, for example, the Australian constitution which was written some hundred and ten years ago by a limited number of white men is legitimate to rule a completely different mix of Australians. If we take the aboriginal perspective, was the constitution ever legitimate? And furthermore, what does a legitimate constitution look like?

We're also confronted with the lack of a clear and definite set of long-term goals created by, for example again, the people of Australia. We have to ask ourselves where are we going not only as a country-wide citizenry, but also as a local community, as a region, as a state, and as a people on this earth. What are our collective long-term goals? We can't definitely answer these questions at this point and it is something that needs a considerable amount of research as there is little if any in the current academic literature. We've also got to ask who or what is or are controlling our long-term destinies? Is it big industrial business with its well informed public relations and normative value shaping capacities? Is it a governmental elite with deep pockets (something reeking of conspiracy theories and new world orderism so don't read too much into this example) in cahoots with industry? Or is it a bit of everything and we are collectively moving somewhere (perhaps forwards?) as a Leviathan with a vague notion, perhaps a guessable idea, of a direction?

It could be useful for you to apply this theory and attempt to answer these questions when trying to gauge the effectiveness of your government, especially before an election. For example, what has been done to mitigate problems of unaccountability or corruption? Are these even problems in your government? Have a think, and if they are, blog your finds. You just might be enhancing democracy and improving the human condition with your very own actions.